DBHDS
Virginia Department of
**Behavioral Health and
Developmental Services**

Frequently Asked Questions   Building a Diverse & Inclusive Workforce

Introduction- Assessing readiness for a diversity and inclusion initiative

There is a growing body of research regarding the benefits of diverse teams in the areas of organizational performance and problem-solving. In addition, there are some powerful examples of leading human service organizations which successfully utilized diversity to help generate innovative initiatives and services that delivered tangible benefits to their organizations, employees, and communities.

While many of the documented examples of diversity initiatives focus on race and gender, the concept of diversity is broader and encompasses factors including age, culture, personality, skill, training, educational background and life experience. The influence of a variety of perspectives and viewpoints can contribute to flexibility and creativity within organizations, which can help it thrive. Below is a list of questions that should be asked when determining whether your organization is ready and able to take on a diversity and inclusion initiative.

o   Are there disparities between groups in how they perceive they are treated (e.g., by seniority, race, age, gender, education, parental status, etc.)?

o   What is the demographic makeup of your workforce by level and how does that compare to the surrounding labor force? Who are you not having access to in recruiting and promoting?

o   What are your projected recruitment needs in terms of skills and positions?

o   What are the statistics in the labor market relative to your needs?

o   Where are there untapped resources of talent within the organization such as overqualified, underutilized or undeveloped employees?

o   What recruiting obstacles are you finding?

o   What are your organization's critical needs for creativity and innovation?

o   What are the statistics around grievances, complaints and lawsuits in your organization that demonstrate vulnerability or unaddressed problems?

o   How much has your organization spent on legal fees and settlements for discrimination and/or wrongful termination lawsuits?

o   Which departments, divisions, or groups are experiencing low morale, diminished performance or conflict?

o   What are the statistics regarding absenteeism?

o   What is the rate of turnover and what is the cost to the organization of replacing those who leave?

o   What do exit interviews tell you about why people leave?

o   What are the demographics of your existing and projected customer base?

o   How do the demographics of your workforce compare to those of your customer (client or patient) base?

o   How many languages and cultures are represented in your catchment area?

o   How many of these languages and cultures are represented in your workforce?

o   What are your customers' or clients' perceptions of your workforce?

o   What do customer satisfaction surveys tell you about missed opportunities and needed improvements in products or services?

o   What customer complaints have you received?

o   What (if any) discrimination lawsuits have been brought against your organization by external entities?

o   Are there any instances of negative publicity for your organization (e.g., bad press, boycotts, and protests)?

o   Where are there negative perceptions about your organization by external entities?

References

McFarlane, Fiona. (2010). Questions for Directors to Ask. Diversity Briefings. New York, NY.

Society for Human Resource Management. (2007). Business Plan for Diversity. Atlanta, Ga.